



News Release

For immediate release: September 28, 2011

(11-144)

Contacts: Kate Lynch, Communications Office
Margaret Hansen, Coordinated School Health

360-236-4072

360-236-3757

They are all in their places with bright shiny faces...

Keeping our kids healthy and active also helps improve learning in school

OLYMPIA — They have their backpacks filled with books and supplies, lunch boxes filled with healthy choices, clothing for our changing weather, and comfortable shoes. Now that our children are back in school, they have everything they need, right?

Mostly right. Many schools are making sure children have healthy foods and drinks, and ways to be physically active. Kids also need a good start at home – with a healthy breakfast and walk to school or the bus stop. Parents can help them get that start.

There's a direct link between the health of young people and their academic success. "Breakfast is the most important meal of the day," said State Health Officer Dr. Maxine Hayes. "We know that children who have a good breakfast – such as whole grain cereal or an egg, low-fat milk and fruit – and lots of physical activity, have an easier time paying attention in class and learning."

Many schools offer low-cost or free breakfast for children who arrive before classes begin. Most schools offer physical education and other ways for children to be active.

"In addition to healthy food," said Margaret Hansen, coordinator of the School Health Program at the Department of Health, "our physical activity experts tell us that children need at least an hour of moderate to vigorous activity every day. Things kids enjoy like walking, swimming, bicycling, and dancing."

Pediatricians are beginning to see more children who are obese and have diseases like type 2 diabetes – once unheard of in children. Poor health also affects the ability of children to learn. Parents can make it easier for kids to choose healthy foods and be physically active. Keep healthy snacks like carrots, string cheese, and whole-grain crackers at home and in children's lunches. Encourage your child to walk to school or the bus stop. Or make it family time and walk

with them. Make sure your child knows how to stay safe, especially [crossing streets](#) (www.saferoutespartnership.org/).

“Breathing exhaust from cars idling while parents wait to pick up their kids can cause problems for children with asthma,” Hansen said. “One in 10 households in Washington has at least one child with [asthma](#) (<http://www.doh.wa.gov/cfh/asthma/schools/default.htm>).”

Some tips for keeping kids healthy:

- Avoid sodas and other calorie-laden beverages such as fruit drinks and sports drinks. These beverages encourage weight gain, and high sugar content can cause cavities in teeth.
- Serve whole grains like whole wheat bread, crackers, and pasta whenever possible.
- Most (75 percent) young people need to eat more fruits and veggies. Keep sliced apples or unsweetened apple sauce on hand. Kids love [fun foods](#) (www.fruitsandveggiesmorematters.org/) like “ants on a log,” celery sticks filled with peanut butter and dotted with raisins.
- Turn off your TV and limit computer and video games. Watching television is associated with eating high-calorie, low-nutrient foods that are frequently advertised on television. The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends that children watch no more than two hours of television a day; children under age 2 should watch no television.
- Encourage children to wash hands with soap and water after using the bathroom and before eating.
- Remember your flu shot! Many health care providers have flu vaccine available now. Everyone – children and adults – should be protected from this serious disease.
- Children should brush their teeth twice daily with fluoride toothpaste, floss once a day, and have sealants applied to their permanent back teeth (ask your school if they have a sealant program).
- Parents are role models for their children. Go for a walk or bike ride with your children.

Our [Back to School](#) page offers more ways to keep kids healthy and safe.

Learn more about how your school is helping make children healthier: [Healthy Schools Washington](#). The [Department of Health website](#) (www.doh.wa.gov) is your source for *a healthy dose of information*. Also, [find us on Facebook](#) and [follow us on Twitter](#).